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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 TUNIS 000160

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STATE FOR S/CT (DAILEY, PALMER, WORMAN, INGALLS), NEA/FO
(GRAY) AND NEA/MAG (HARRIS AND HOPKINS)

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [MARR](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SOCI](#) [KISL](#) [TS](#)
SUBJECT: S/CT AMB. DAILEY PRESSES GOT TO COMBAT FOREIGN
FIGHTERS

Classified By: Ambassador Robert F. Godec for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

[11](#). (S/NF) During his February 10-12 visit to Tunisia, State Department Coordinator for Counterterrorism (CT) Ambassador-at-Large Dell Dailey urged the GOT to take steps to prevent the flow of Tunisian foreign fighters into Iraq. Several senior GOT officials, including the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Defense, agreed that the presence of Tunisians in Iraq was disturbing and represented a threat to Tunisia. The Foreign Minister indicated he would raise the foreign fighter challenge with the Syrians, but stressed Tunisian influence on Syria is limited. The Minister of Interior balked at the request for Advance Passenger Information (API) Sharing, preferring to argue the USG should do more to assist Tunisian CT efforts. Similarly, the Foreign and Defense ministers stressed that Tunisia's military needs more US support. Ambassador Dailey's visit underscored our request that Tunisia increase CT cooperation and press Syria to do more to impede the flow of foreign fighters. Whether the GOT will respond with tangible actions remains to be seen. End Summary.

FOREIGN FIGHTERS - REAL OR IMAGINARY THREAT?

[12](#). (SBU) During his February 10-12 visit, Ambassador Dailey was accompanied by NEA Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Gordon Gray and Beth Ingalls from S/CT. In addition to his official meetings with the ministers of Foreign Affairs, Interior and Defense, Dailey also met with representatives of G8 missions in Tunis, private Tunisian contacts and visiting UK Minister of State Tony McNulty.

[13](#). (S) Although all GOT interlocutors highlighted Tunisia's commitment to fighting terrorism, their responses to S/CT Ambassador Dailey's presentations on the foreign fighter pipeline differed. Foreign Minister Abdelwaheb Abdallah said he was surprised that so many Tunisians were foreign fighters in Iraq, despite all the GOT has done to combat terrorist ideologies. Abdallah said that was evidence that a small number of young people have been brainwashed and that Tunisia must continue to be vigilant and cooperate with like-minded partners like the United States. He went on to stress that President Ben Ali has always had an international perspective on terrorism and Tunisia was prepared to exchange information, share views and focus on the same targets. Minister of National Defense Kamel Morjane also told Dailey that Tunisia has taken a strong stance against terrorism for decades and highlighted US-Tunisian shared values,

particularly on subjects such as foreign fighters. Although Minister of Interior Rafik Belhaj Kacem also began by highlighting a shared commitment to fighting terrorism and long-standing US-Tunisian ties, most of his comments took a different tack. Expressing his usual abrasiveness, he told Dailey "You should not consider Tunisia a source of terrorists," although he said he had seen the presentation details months ago.

14. (S) Director of Military Intelligence General Mohamed Meddeb expressed greater concern about the foreign fighter threat. Meddeb noted that US actions in Iraq are reducing the operating ability of terrorists, who could then return to Tunisia or elsewhere to continue their terrorist activities. Stressing the importance of interagency cooperation, Dailey told Meddeb that the Tunisian Ministry of Interior knew more about this threat, but said Tunis DAO would pass Meddeb related details. Morjane added he was surprised that those who facilitated the foreign fighter network had kept such extensive documentation, noting that many terrorists are educated and are meticulous about covering their tracks.

CT COOPERATION ESSENTIAL, BUT DEBATABLE

15. (S/NF) Belhaj Kacem, whose ministry would be responsible for taking action on USG requests for foreign fighter deliverables, said Tunisia had already done much in this regard. Rather than offer cooperation, Belhaj Kacem said Tunisia needs more and better CT cooperation from the United States, especially as it relates to border control. He repeatedly asked for a list of Tunisian nationals detained in Iraqi prisons. Dailey urged the Ministry of Interior (MOI)

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to provide details about the 38 Tunisians referenced in the presentation. Belhaj Kacem said US-Tunisian cooperation must be faster and that Tunisia needs more US training and equipment. (Comment: GRPO's experience is that Tunisian cooperation is extremely slow compared to US responsiveness. End Comment.) However, he rejected outright the suggestion that Tunisia consider Advance Passenger Information (API) data sharing. Belhaj Kacem also refused to provide additional MOI assistance on an urgent national security matter (reported through GRPO channels).

16. (S) Turning to military counterterrorism efforts, Ministers Morjane and Abdallah stressed their disappointment in declining Foreign Military Financing for Tunisia (septel), noting that such declines limited Tunisia's ability to secure its borders - a key aspect of controlling the foreign fighter pipeline. Abdallah said the Tunisian borders, particularly with Algeria, include difficult terrain that requires modern and sophisticated surveillance equipment. (Note: Post's proposal for \$10 million in FY08 Section 1206 funding for Tunisia includes ground surveillance radar for use in the border regions. End Note.) Abdallah said Tunisia needs US assistance, but will always combat terrorism regardless of the level of international support.

LIMITED HELP ON SYRIA

17. (S) Abdallah and Morjane said they were not surprised Arab foreign fighters generally travel through Turkey to Syria, as many Arab countries are exempt from visa requirements. On pressing Syria to do more, Abdallah said that Tunisia would do what it can to convince Syria of the need to prevent foreign fighters from traveling to Iraq. While promising to "exert as much pressure as possible," Abdallah said Tunisia does not have a very strong relationship with Syria. Dailey also pressed the Ministers of Interior and Defense to encourage Syrian counterparts to take action to stem the flow of foreign fighters; neither provided a substantive response.

RELATIONSHIP WITH AQ

¶18. (S) Meddeb asked about the links between al-Qaeda and the former GSPC (now al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, AQIM) in Algeria. He said the rise in AQIM operations is clear, but that he had seen no evidence of financial, training or personnel cooperation. Dailey agreed that AQIM tactics, such as suicide bombings, are clearly taken from al-Qaeda, which Meddeb attributed to an ideological merger.

¶19. (S) In his meeting with UK Home Office Minister of State Tony McNulty, Dailey discussed terrorism in Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Maghreb. McNulty said he was concerned about the spread of terrorism in North Africa and was visiting Tunisia to explore possibilities for increased CT cooperation. He said he would explore the possibility of UK support for Tunisian counter terrorist finance efforts, for which the GOT had approached the USG for support.

COMMENT

¶10. (S/NF) The contrasting responses of the ministers to our request for additional Tunisian efforts to combat foreign fighters is reflective of Tunisia's unwillingness to apply an interagency approach to CT efforts. Although the MFA always stresses the GOT's commitment to fighting terrorism, and Defense often shares its own concerns about domestic terrorist threats, the Ministry of Interior, which has primary responsibility for internal security and border controls, rarely coordinates with other GOT entities. However, despite Belhaj Kacem's dismissive attitude, the recent increase in the number of Tunisians convicted for attempting to travel to Iraq suggests the GOT is actively trying to disrupt the foreign fighter pipeline. End Comment.

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